

From: Beutler, Lisa

Sent: Monday, May 17, 2004 8:09 PM

Subject: recent press and info request

Dear Caucus Chairs,

As you may know, Columnist Dan Walters from the Sacramento Bee published a story about the State Water Plan today. We have learned the article was edited for some of the McClatchy papers and as such was not printed in full in some locations. The full article follows. We will set aside a few minutes in the Caucus Meeting Briefings to discuss the article.

The bulk of our caucus time will be spent reviewing the most recent draft (we hope this will be posted by Wednesday) and looking at the production schedule. If there are specific topics you would like to discuss in your individual caucus meetings, please drop me an email so we can prepare any additional needed information.

Sincerely,
Lisa Beutler

**Commentary: Davis-era update of State Water Plan gets a rewrite
Sacramento Bee - 5/17/04
By Dan Walters, staff columnist**

The simple fact is that most of California is semiarid, with relatively scant annual rainfall concentrated in a few winter months - and its evolution into a society of 36 million people with an economy of global proportions has been utterly dependent on its intensive system of impounding and distributing water.

Water remains central to California's future. But the engineering solutions of the past - building more dams and canals - face immense environmental and financial barriers, and the politics of water have become a morass of conflicting interests, each focused on protecting its share and resisting encroachment by others.

It's not entirely static. Southern California's water agencies, after much angst, appear to be making measurable progress toward shifting a significant piece of the state's Colorado River water allocation from farms to cities, to serve expanding urban demands and to cope with a severe cutback in supplies from the Colorado. The Colorado basin is experiencing extended drought, and Nevada and Arizona are demanding greater shares. This month, the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California announced an agreement under which it will pay farmers to allow their land to go out of production in return for a share of their water allotments.

To the north, meanwhile, a state-federal-local effort dubbed "Cal-Fed," aimed at resolving differences over how to use water in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta - California's most important water-supply conduit - continues to have successes and failures, incrementally making physical and metaphysical adjustments that its advocates believe will improve water supplies while making the Delta a better habitat for fish and wildlife.

Cal-Fed is emblematic of the emerging truth about California's water situation: It's a never-ending process of social, economic, political and hydrologic adjustment rather than something with a beginning and an end. And the political problems Cal-Fed has developed continue to revolve about the central conflict over water: whether future demands should be met through construction of more storage that would capture flows during wet months, or through conserving and redistributing existing supplies.

Jonas Minton, a California Department of Water Resources deputy director with a background in environmental activism, launched a huge overhaul of the State Water Plan (it's supposed to be done every five years) during the latter years of the Gray Davis administration. And the draft product reflected the convictions of environmentalists that conservation and reallocation, rather than new storage, were how California should meet its demands as the state adds an estimated 17 million people by 2030.

As drafts of the Water Plan update circulated within the tightly knit "water community," those who favored more storage, inside and outside the department, went ballistic, seeing its language (which one critic dubbed "psycho-babble") as a pre-emptive strike by rivals. As it happened, the Minton-led rewrite came to fruition as Democrat Davis was being ousted by voters, and when Republican Arnold Schwarzenegger became governor, Minton left DWR.

DWR has a new director, veteran federal and state water official Lester Snow, and the Minton version of the Water Plan update has been, department sources say, junked in favor of one that takes a more balanced approach.

Snow, in an interview, wouldn't go that far, but did say that "we've slowed it up a little bit" and added that it's being revised to reflect what he calls "integrated resource management" that combines conservation, reallocation and storage to meet regional and statewide water needs. "You need to pick the mix," he said.

A new draft of the Water Plan update retains much of the Minton language but adds a section that lays out the multifaceted approach Snow articulates - pointedly including more storage in the options.

"The purpose of the State Plan is to keep the increments moving in the right direction," said Snow, who managed the incremental Cal-Fed process for several years before becoming DWR director.

That's no easy job in a state as complex, as fast-growing and as thirsty as California.#